

Old Akyem and the Origins of Akyems Abuakwa and Kotoku 1675–1775

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The Akyem are Akan-speaking forest peoples located in southeastern Ghana. Most attempts to reconstruct early southern Akan history have focused on the polities of Akwamu, Denkyira, and, eventually most powerful of all, Asante. As will become clear, however, Akyem played a crucial role in the far-reaching economic, social, and political changes which marked the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century history of the old Gold Coast and its interior and was significantly involved with the better-researched and better-known Akan states noted above. In short, Akyem in this early period deserves more attention than it has received, and this paper is a brief and introductory attempt to grant that attention.

Once Akyem, rather than one or another of its neighbors, becomes the focus of historical inquiry, one basic question (among many less imposing ones) quickly comes to the fore: that of the relationship between Old Akyem and its offspring Akyem Abuakwa and Akyem Kotoku. Nearly all historians of the early Gold Coast have written as if Akyem Abuakwa and Akyem Kotoku were distinct polities, or at least distinct segments of Old Akyem, from at least the beginning of the eighteenth century. Given the concentration either on nearby polities or on a general history of the region, this is more often inferred or assumed than discussed or analyzed. Ward (1958) is an early case in point; Fynn (1971: esp. 19–20) and the introductory sections on the eighteenth century in Wilks (1975) are more recent ones. These inferences and assumptions are generally supported by Abuakwa and Kotoku traditions, which tend, because of the two polities' long dissociation from one another and frequently unfriendly

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relations throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to deprecate or gloss over their common history.

This usual interpretation of the relationship between Old Akyem and Akyems Abuakwa and Kotoku needs drastic revision, for it fails to explain much of the evidence available on the Akyem past. The evidence instead suggests strongly that old Akyem divided into Akyems Abuakwa and Kotoku only in the second half of the eighteenth century. This evidence, and arguments derived from it, will be presented in the format of an investigation over time of four basic areas of Akyem's life: (1) movements of people into and out of Akyem; (2) economic factors and policies; (3) aspects of internal politics and government; and (4) inter-polity relations. While a brief section will be devoted to an outline of events up to ca. 1675, the crucial period under consideration is ca. 1675 to ca. 1775. As we shall see, Akyem was not a highly unified polity during any of this period, but its basic structure until the middle of the eighteenth century was essentially different from that which, in about the third quarter of the century, produced Akyems Abuakwa and Kotoku. I hope to show that embryonic Abuakwas or Kotokus simply did not exist before that time.

AKYEM UP TO 1675

Akyem before 1675 has received little attention and is still little understood.¹ A brief outline of events up to ca. 1675 will suffice to set the stage for the more intensive investigation of the succeeding period.

The area in which Old Akyem developed included both sides (especially the west) of that section of the Pra River which today separates Asante and the northern part of Akyem Kotoku. It was significant for developments both before and after 1675 that this is one of the auriferous areas which made up the rich southern Akan goldfields. The earliest settlements thus far identified in the Akyem area date to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries,² and nearby fortified entrenchments scattered throughout the area have been dated to the sixteenth century as well (see Davies 1967:287–290; also Kea 1974:160–161). While there are traditions of “aboriginal” settlements in the Akyem area (see Field

¹ The collected papers on early Akan history in Fynn (1966) and Wilks (1971) provide some basic information and an indication of the range and complexity of the problems involved. The work of Kea (1974) and Wilks (1978), in particular, has begun to make crucial aspects of this early period more understandable, and the results of David Kyagga-Mulindwa's combined archaeological and historical research into the early history of the Birim Valley should provide an even clearer and more comprehensive picture.

² David Kyagga-Mulindwa has generously provided me two radiocarbon dates for such early villages: A.D. 1510 ± 80 and A.D. 1465 ± 65.

1948:1–5, 199), many of Akyem's earliest settlers, including those associated with the early management and organization of the Akyem-area mines and the group which provided the Asona clan paramount of later Akyem Abuakwa, were matrilineally organized groups from the old Adanse area, now southern Asante (see, e.g., Field 1948:2–3; Ward 1958:109; Institute of African Studies 1963a:1; 1963b:1–2). This is precisely what southern Akan traditions in general, which claim the Adanse area as the “homeland” of the southern Akan (see Boaten 1971), and the more inclusive reconstruction of early developments among the southern Akan by Wilks (1978) would lead one to expect.

In Wilks's reconstruction (and in subsequent comments on that reconstruction), from a beginning in the old Adanse area, the fifteenth and especially the sixteenth century are seen as the height of the extensive clearing of the southern Akan forest region and the creation there of an agrarian order. This great socioeconomic transformation was based on the utilization of massive inputs of unfree labor made available by trade, both to the north and to the coast, of southern Akan gold. It was structured through the creation of the Akan matriclan system, which provided the means to organize the necessary manpower for the tasks of forest clearance and subsequent agricultural production and to permit the integration of the immigrants with the Akan already established in the forest zone. As this transformation led to the replacement of hunting and gathering by food crop production as the dominant mode of production, people were redistributed, including the unfree immigrants, into agricultural work units each organized under the aegis and control of a putatively matrilineal lineage (*abusua*). Membership in an *abusua*, however, was regulated by complex rules which referred not only to kinship, but to adoption as well, and in both cases was based primarily upon an individual's contribution to the productive unit.

Traditions are clear in associating the beginnings of this agricultural order organized on matrilineal principles with the beginnings of offices (stools) vested in *abusua*. For example, in one recension of tradition concerning the beginnings of the new order made by *asantehene* Nana Agyeman Prempeh I while in exile in 1907, a hunter's encounter with the new order involved his meeting first a herald and then a woman bearing a stool (Wilks 1978). With the founding of each new settlement by an *abusua* came the founding of a stool vested in that *abusua* and located, at least in the beginning, in the founding settlement. Frequently the boundaries initially established for such a settlement included an area large enough for additional settlements, each with its own stool, eventually to be established within the area by off-shoot (or other related) *abusua* (for an Akyem Kotoku example of a process such as this, see Field 1948:58). It seems that through at least the first half of the sixteenth century either individual communal agricultural groups or related and contiguous

groups such as those just described formed the highest political authority in Akyem and elsewhere in the forest interior (see Field 1948:2; Kea 1974: 160–162, Wilks 1978).

Only very gradually, over the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, did the inhabitants of Akyem and elsewhere in the forest interior seem to develop a general territorial consciousness transcending individual (or a small number of closely related and contiguous) settlements and *abusua* and in some instances begin to organize into political units which transcended these local boundaries. The impetus toward this expansion of consciousness and organization seems to have derived from two related concerns over the control of basic economic resources. One of these concerns was to gain more local control of the production and marketing of gold. (Prior to this, such control lay primarily in an elaborate and extensive organization based essentially on extraterritorial or “linear” principles; this organization was pioneered by Malian julas or Wangara and then gradually taken over and expanded during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by forest traders centered initially in the Adanse area and known as Akani — see Kea 1974:9–19, 88–147.) A second and growing concern was with the management of land and the structuring of land rights as the number and proximity of settlements headed by *abusua* of different matrilineages increased. (For a brief discussion of these concerns and their relationship to the rise of small polities in Asante, see Wilks 1978.)

It is not yet clear whether during this period small polities developed in Akyem as they did, for example, in Asante and Adanse.³ The existence of some consciousness of a general Akyem territory by the early seventeenth century is attested to by the identification of “Akim or Great Acanij” to the northwest of Akwamu in the famous Dutch map of the Gold Coast of 1629 (translated and reproduced as the end map to *Ghana Notes and Queries* in Fynn 1966). Some local control (including trading) of the area’s main exportable resources — gold and slaves — also seems implied in this and other early seventeenth-century sources (e.g., Brun

³ The list of the predecessors of Ofori Panin, one of the principal Akyem leaders of the early eighteenth century and in the remembered line of Akyem Abuakwa paramounts — Oduro, Boakye, Agyekum Aduware, Boakye Mesah, and Aninkwatia — as recorded in Djan (1936:104) reads, however, suspiciously as if these were the alternating patrilineal *ntoro* names Boakye and Agye (cf. n. 14 below and also the lists in Reindorf n.d. [1895]:348–349 and Danquah 1928:242–243). If the stool occupied by Ofori Panin had passed in a patrilineal line for some three to five generations before settling into a matrilineal succession pattern with him and his successors, it might have been the focus of a small early polity (or polity-like structure) similar to that described in Adanse during roughly this same period by Berberich (i.p.): “Traditionally independent . . . the Adanse towns recognized a leader in the holder of the *Afenakwa*, a state sword. Although originally passed patrilineally, and held by different towns, the *Afenakwa* was kept in the royal family of Fomena and passed matrilineally after the mid-seventeenth century. Thus a state, built around a common tradition and loyalty to the *Afenakwa*, had probably begun to develop in Adanse. It was composed of about seven towns.”

1969 [1624]:28 identifies traders in Accra in 1614 who almost surely were from the Akyem area).

THE RISE OF OLD AKYEM AND RELATIONS WITH ASANTE, DENKYIRA, AND AKWAMU

While the Akyem had been evolving throughout most of the seventeenth century as an increasingly distinct identity and began in the second half of that century to develop structures which led to the creation of an Akyem state, the final consolidation of that state and its rise as a significant political power occurred in the period from ca. 1675 to 1730. It is notable that these developments in Akyem were contemporary with the even more striking rise of two of its neighbors: Asante, on Akyem's northwestern border, and Akwamu to the immediate southeast. Under the fabled Osei Tutu during the last quarter of the seventeenth century, an Asante kingdom emerged which over the course of the eighteenth century became the largest and most centralized polity in the Gold Coast region and beyond (on the rise of Asante see, e.g., Wilks 1971:372–381; Fynn 1966, 1971). Preceding, while not eventually matching, the emergence of Asante as a great power was the rise to eminence of Akwamu. With the seizure of power in 1677 from its patron, the king of Accra, Akwamu began a period of territorial expansion and governmental centralization on a scale without precedent in the Gold Coast region. By the early eighteenth century, Akwamu was the most powerful and centralized state the region had ever seen (see Kea, this volume; also Kea 1974:169–275; Wilks 1957, 1958, 1971:367–369). As we shall see, Akyem was able, at least through 1730, to maintain itself *vis-à-vis* Asante while at the same time strengthening its position in the face of Akwamu power to such an extent that by 1730 Akyem forces helped destroy the Akwamu empire.

Significant movements of people did not end with the establishment of early settlers from Adanse in the area of Old Akyem. Rather, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries people continued to move into and beyond Akyem. In the 1675-1730 period, two movements of people deserve special mention. The first was the migration to Akyem of the occupant and supporters of the stool which eventually became the paramount stool of Akyem Kotoku. The second was the gradual movement of various Akyem into the northwestern Akwamu hinterland.

Akyem Kotoku traditions are clear in their assertion that the state of Denkyira, farther west, was the original home of their paramount stool, the Denkyira-Mmerayam stool (Institute of African Studies 1966:1–2; also 1963c:1; Ward 1958:109; Field 1948:3). The occupant of the stool when it came to Akyem was Ofosu Apenten (d. 1717) of the Agona clan; he led his followers from their Denkyira homeland to, eventually, the

Bomfa area on the western bank of the Anum River, then part of or bordering Akyem territory and now well within Asante. Kotoku traditions continue by claiming that trouble between Apenten and his relative, the *denkyirahene*, caused the former to leave Denkyira with his supporters. The timing of this move is not quite clear, but it appears that it was shortly before the 1699–1701 war between Denkyira and Asante (Institute of African Studies 1966:1–2). Apenten's decision to settle fewer than thirty miles from Kumase, the center of Asante power, and moreover on the Kumase side of the Anum, implies that he may have taken, at least indirectly, Asante's side in the Denkyira-Asante conflict. Such a position would certainly match up with the tradition of the quarrel between Apenten and the *denkyirahene*, whether this quarrel occurred before or after the Denkyira defeat.

The gradual movement of Akyem into the northwestern Akwamu hinterland before 1730 is treated somewhat less directly in tradition. Akwamu traditions claim that Ofori Panin requested and received from the *akwamuhene* a grant of land in Akwamu. This land was reportedly located at and around Bansa, some eight miles from the present-day Akyem Abuakwa capital of Kibi (traditions of the old Akwamu towns Akwatia and Asamankese report the transaction and the specific location — Institute of African Studies 1963a:1; 1963b:1–2; the transaction is also noted in Wilks 1958:115; Field 1948:3; and Ward 1958:108).⁴

TRADE AND STATE FINANCES, 1675–1730

Gold and slaves, the major Akyem resources in the pre-1675 period, remained the major sources of wealth after 1675. The Danish, Dutch, and English merchants around 1700 all recognized Akyem as one of the major sources of gold (as reported respectively by Norregard 1966:63; Bosman 1967 [1705]:78; Kea 1974:224). The rising power of Akwamu, its frequent enmity toward Akyem, and its even more frequent attempts to control and limit Akyem's trade to the coast caused continual economic problems for Akyem. Danish, Dutch, and English traders at

⁴ While this seems rather near Akwamu centers, the location of Bansa to the west of the Atewa Range (while Kibi, established by Akyem Abuakwa much later, lies on its eastern slope) tends to strengthen traditional claims that Akyem settlers moved into this area prior to 1730. The natural geographical break provided by the Atewa Range could have served as a *de facto* geopolitical marker, with the most significant Akwamu population limited to east of the range (settlements to the west may have been unsafe during the frequent periods when Akyem and Akwamu were at odds during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries). Of all the important old Akwamu towns remembered, only one, Kwabeng, lay in the northwest, beyond the Atewa Range (Institute of African Studies 1963a:1–2; Johnson 1964:9). Conversely, of the five divisional seats — the most important towns — of later Abuakwa, all lie in the northwest of former old Akwamu or beyond and only one, Kwabeng, is remembered as being also an important Akwamu town.

Cape Coast all commented upon Akwamu hindrance of Akyem trade to the coast (Kwamena-Poh 1973:35). Rømer (1965[1760]:7), on the Gold Coast from about 1735 to 1750, even claimed that the Akyem could not trade southward at all: "the Aqvamboes [Akwamu] practiced the policy of never letting the Akims come down to the coast, not even to Aqvamboe; the Aqvamboes black traders, however, brought their goods to Akim. They painted us Europeans as horrid; that we were sea monsters. . . ." This is clearly an exaggeration and a simplification of a complex issue. Kea (1974:226–228) argues that the "Akwamu government maintained an ambivalent attitude towards the [traders] from inland kingdoms such as Akyem and Kwahu." The numerous Dutch, Danish, and English sources he cites from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century indicate both periods of Akwamu limitation and control of Akyem trade and periods (e.g., when Akwamu was engaged in a major military campaign elsewhere) in which Akyem merchants were not prevented from traveling to the coast to trade. He summarizes: "Akyem access to the ports on the Akwamu coast was contingent upon the vagaries of the Akwamu governments' commercial and political policies."

Akwamu governmental interference with Akyem trade had its roots in the pre-1675 period. For example, Wilks (1957:104–105) notes that the Dutch fiscal Caarloff paid several visits in 1646–1647 "in person to the King of Akwamu in an attempt to persuade him to open the paths to Kwamana and Akim merchants." Fynn (1971:23) points out that Akwamu's alliance with Agona between 1659 and 1680 was not only to secure Akwamu's western frontier, but to prevent Akyem and other inland traders from bypassing Accra and Akwamu control by trading to the coast through Agona (see also Rømer 1965 [1760]:8; Reindorf n.d. [1895]:62). Moreover, this Akwamu interference seems at least as politically as economically motivated. For example, it was a capital offense for an Akwamu to sell firearms or powder to Akyem (Rømer 1965 [1760]:8; see also Fynn 1971:40, 46–47). Akwamu institutional control of Akyem trade to the south operated primarily in times of peace. As noted above, when Akwamu was at war elsewhere, Akyem traders were allowed to come to the coast. Conversely, when war between Akwamu and Akyem threatened or actually took place, Akyem trade through Akwamu-controlled territory was not limited or controlled, but halted as completely as the Akwamu government could manage.

Akyem was thus not in an enviable economic or political position. The gold and slaves which represented the main sources of prestige and wealth for both individuals and the state and which made possible the purchase of European goods could often be traded only on Akwamu sufferance and subject to Akwamu restrictions. Potentially the most damaging of these restrictions for Akyem was the Akwamu government's attempts to limit Akyem's access to the European commodity becoming

crucial for the building or maintenance of a strong state: firearms and their accessories.

Recognized as important both on the coast and in the interior by the 1660's, firearms had become the dominant weapon of warfare in the Gold Coast region by the end of the seventeenth century (Kea 1971; 1974: ch. 4). Almost from the beginning, rulers and their governmental functionaries used the wealth and trading organization available to them to make firearms and their accessories essentially state monopolies. By 1700, for example, Akwamu's large and powerful army was composed almost entirely of musketeers whose weapons, gunpowder, and ammunition were supplied primarily by the state (Kea 1974:322–337). Such major expenditures were made possible by the development of state treasuries, a development Wilks has emphasized and demonstrated as important both for the rise of Akwamu (1957:104; 1958:6–8) and later for the growth and maintenance of Asante (1975: esp. 418–445). There can be no doubt, then, that any limitations imposed by Akwamu on both one of the primary means (trade) and one of the most important ends (firearms and accessories) of building up the Akyem treasury would have had negative effects on Akyem. That Akwamu restrictions on Akyem trade in general and Akyem access to firearms in particular were not ultimately effective, however, is made clear by the Akyem success in the 1730 conflict with Akwamu and the fact that significant armed Akyem contingents fought against Asante in 1699–1702 and 1717.

When we turn from the economics of trade to the economics of production, we find that information concerning the organization of the extractive gold industry in Akyem is meager. We can only assume that some kind of organization and control by the Akyem state did exist, as government control of the extractive industry was common practice among Akan polities (see, e.g., Wilks 1975:435–436).

A reference to gold extraction in Akyem is found in Akyem Oda (Kotoku) tradition (Institute of African Studies 1966:5–6), where it is asserted that the Kotoku were the only Akyem who “owned” gold mines or, more importantly, knew how to mine gold. This assertion deserves careful consideration. A connection with the mines would have tended to make certain Akyem relatively immobile. It would follow, then, that because the Akyem Kotoku state developed in the territory most nearly coterminous with Old Akyem (which included most of the Old Akyem gold mines), those Akyem who were associated with the mines should have become Kotoku. Association with the mines was not based on allegiance to some embryonic Kotoku which existed in the Old Akyem polity. Rather, it was ties to the mines and the economic activities associated with them that linked certain Kotoku to specific locations. When a distinct Kotoku polity gradually emerged which incorporated the area of the mines, those associated with the mines tended to become a part of it.

It was this economic “allegiance,” as it were, rather than a political allegiance to a segment of Old Akyem destined to become Kotoku, that accounted for these persons’ becoming Kotoku.

ASPECTS OF AKYEM GOVERNMENT, 1675–1730

Writing of the 1680’s, Barbot (1746 [1732]:189) describes Akyem government in the following terms: “This country was formerly a monarchy, and now a commonwealth, after several changes and revolutions in the government, which renders it the less formidable to its neighbours, because of the factions and divisions the republican government is subject to; . . . and therefore this country, for want of unity and a good understanding among the natives, is not so powerful as formerly.” This passage and other detailed references by Bosman (1967 [1705]:69, 78) underscore the following points: (1) Europeans on the coast believed that Akyem had formerly been a monarchy; (2) the late seventeenth century saw “several changes and revolutions in the government” of Akyem; (3) the result of these changes was “a sort of Commonwealth,” with “the Governing Men of the Kingdom” taking a part of the administration into their hands; (4) this decentralized leadership was seen as making Akyem weaker than it otherwise might have been; and (5) the shared Akyem leadership was exploited by Akwamu, which sowed “Dissensions betwixt the Governing Men of *Akim*.”⁵

By 1729, on the eve of the fall of Akwamu, additional information is available on Akyem government which confirms and adds detail to the earlier descriptions. Akyem in 1729 was governed by three rulers, the “three great Caboceers” Frempong Manso (who succeeded Apenten in 1717), Bakwante (who succeeded Ofori Panin in 1727), and Owusu. Wilks (1958:95–96) admits that the relationship among the three is vague, but we may conjecture that this threefold division of Akyem royal power had its origins in three fundamental historical processes: first, the traditional division of the Akan military into three main wings; second, the incorporation into Akyem of the Denkyira-Mmerayam stool, which later became the paramount stool of Akyem Kotoku; and third, the early development of shared authority in Akyem.⁶ While no specific informa-

⁵ While Barbot wrote in the 1680’s, his observations were not published until 1732 (by a surviving brother), and certain passages read as if they might have been taken from the earlier-published Bosman. For example, while the quotations above on Akyem are not especially similar, the nearby Barbot passages on Denkyira and Akani (pp. 188–189) are very close paraphrases of the corresponding Bosman (pp. 73, 77).

⁶ An Akyem Kotoku tradition inadvertently supports this proposition. The tradition, which has as its purpose the attempt to demonstrate that the Abuakwa were at one time “subjects” of the Kotoku, states that in the campaign against Asante which can be dated to 1717 the Abuakwa formed, supposedly under the Kotoku, the *adonten* or center division of

tion on Akyem army organization for the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries has yet been discovered, recent studies of predecessor states (Akwamu and Denkyira) leave little doubt that the same basic pattern of wings — the center (*adonten*), left wing (*benkum*), and right wing (*nifa*), in which early political divisions or provinces replicated military organization — was also adopted in Akyem. Second, as already noted, Ofoosu Apenten came from Denkyira to settle on the borders of Akyem in about 1699–1701. It would have been advantageous both for the immigrants and for Akyem for the former to be integrated into the Akyem state as rapidly as possible.⁷ Once integrated, a stool of such age and previous importance as the Denkyira-Mmerayam stool would surely have held a position of considerable rank. The tradition of shared authority may also have derived from a situation resembling a regency, in which the elder “governing men of the kingdom” exercised control during the reign of a young and weak king. This situation could have persisted in later stages of development, so that the paramount ruler was considered only *primus inter pares* (see, for example, Kea 1974:185 on Akwamu). A possible parallel can be found in a description of political leadership in the western Akan state of Assini (Loyer 1714:260–261): “There are three generals in the kingdom, who are nearly equal in the authority they have.” One of these “generals” was also titled king, one was the king’s “nephew,” and the other was the king’s “brother.”⁸ The likelihood that the “nephew” was a sister’s son and that the “brother” was of a different matriline (having the same father as the king, but a different mother, from a different clan) means that authority in Assini in the early eighteenth century may have been shared among two matrilineally related leaders and one from a different clan, just as in Akyem. Even if this last detailed similarity did not obtain, however, the sharing of power among three military leaders possessing “nearly equal authority” makes Assini leadership sound very like Akyem’s. What has to be emphasized is that the ongoing (and from all appearances successful) effort to keep the major divisions of Akyem roughly equal in numbers and strength through

the Akyem forces. What this tradition seems to indicate is not some past Kotoku dominance of Abuakwa, but rather that the holder of the stool that later became the Abuakwa paramount was in 1717 the *adontenhene* in Old Akyem.

⁷ While the general turmoil of the period surrounding the Asante-Denkyira war would seem to provide support for this view, circumstances following the war may have led Akyem to perceive special benefits in the incorporation of Apenten and his followers. Not only would they have added numbers to Akyem (surely seen as a benefit, and a not insignificant one in light of Akyem’s reputed battle losses in the war — see below), but, if Apenten had, as suggested above, somehow taken Asante’s side in the conflict between Asante and Denkyira, he would have offered the prospect of a more secure flank and more positive ties to Asante in a period when Akyem could hardly have desired further confrontation.

⁸ I thank R. A. Kea for providing me with this source; the translation used in the text is also his.

constant reshuffling (Field 1948:6) does not imply disunity. Assertions by Fynn (1971:20), Daaku (1970:173), and others that Akyem leadership was split between the rulers of Akyem Abuakwa and Akyem Kotoku from an early period seem to be straightforward examples of reading back into the early eighteenth century the later situation.

AKYEM CONFLICT WITH AKWAMU AND ASANTE

Akyem's interstate relations were dominated by the basic problem of having to deal simultaneously with great — and expanding — powers on both its southeastern and its northwestern border. These two powers, Akwamu and Asante, not only were often hostile to Akyem individually, but frequently acted in concert to isolate and weaken it (Daaku 1970:180–181; Fynn 1971:30). In its dealings with these two neighbors, the results for Akyem were mixed: with Akwamu, Akyem was ultimately more than able to hold its own; Asante, however, eventually proved too strong, though Asante supremacy was not clearly established until after 1730.

In 1675, problems seemed to lie almost entirely with Akwamu. As noted above, Akwamu was about to enter its period of greatest expansion and centralization, and it must have been clear by the last quarter of the seventeenth century that its economic policies (that is, control of trade to the coast) were becoming more and more detrimental to the development of the Akyem treasury and army. Akyem's responses to the rising — and, from Akyem's perspective, frequently oppressive or hostile — power of Akwamu were many, including such tactics as outflanking Akwamu to reach the coast westward of Akwamu control (see, e.g., Kea 1974:201, 228) and taking advantage of the periodic lapses in Akwamu control noted above. Even more drastic and irritating to Akwamu were Akyem's frequent raids on it, carried out either independently or in league with other anti-Akwamu forces. Raids and skirmishes or the threat of them were almost constant between 1675 and 1730.⁹ The seriousness of the Akyem threat to Akwamu is attested to by the continual movement of the latter's capital south and east, apparently motivated not only by shifting trade activities and patterns, but by the fear of Akyem harassment. There even grew up a saying, reported by the Dane Tilleman in 1697 and quoted by Fynn (1971:23): “when the Akwamu, on their oath and fetish, say

⁹ For example, between 1677 and 1681 there were frequent Akyem raids into northwestern Akwamu while Akwamu forces were busy conquering Accra; during the 1680's, Akwamu threats and eventual intervention prevented an Akyem alliance with Agona which would have provided Akyem access to such coastal settlements as Winneba and Apam; meanwhile, in 1688 there were several Akyem-Akwamu skirmishes; 1715 and 1716 were marked by many threats and a few skirmishes; in 1723 Akyem attacked Akwamu; and from 1724 on events were building toward the decisive 1730 conflict.

they are going to make war in the east, it is then that they will generally turn to the west.” Even Akwamu’s general policy of expansion primarily to the south and east was at least partially determined by the formidability of Akyem on its northwestern border (Wilks 1958:5–6, 21–23). All in all, despite Akwamu’s favorable position for controlling trade and coastal access, Akyem was not overwhelmed by its powerful neighbor to the south. Bosman (1967[1705]:65) seems to sum up the situation well: “Aquamboe power is also very terrible to their neighbouring countries, except Akim.” Finally, when internal dissensions within the royal Abrade group had sufficiently weakened Akwamu in 1730, Akyem took advantage of the situation and joined Akwamu homeland and provincial rebels in the overthrow of Akwamu.¹⁰

To the northwest, Akyem was not so successful. Akyem’s first clash with Asante came in the 1699–1701 war between Asante and Denkyira. At least two reasons suggest themselves as to why Akyem chose to ally itself with Denkyira in this conflict. The first was Akyem’s apparently long-standing differences with Akani (Adanse-Assin), which was allied with Asante against Denkyira. One basis for conflict between Akyem and Akani was suggested above: that Akyem had had to gain control over the mining and trading of gold in their area from Akani traders. Also, Dapper (1966[1670]:16–17) indicates differences between Akyem and Akani in the 1660’s, and Daaku (1970:168–169) offers evidence of differences between the two during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. A second and even more important reason for Akyem to oppose Asante at this time was Akyem’s realization that its neighbor was growing extremely powerful and that it was in Akyem’s interest to help Denkyira check that power if it could (Dupuis 1824:230). It could not. The loss of Akyem men was great (as indicated by Bosman 1967[1705]:76, though his figure of 30,000 casualties should not be taken literally).

A surprise Denkyira-Akyem victory over Asante in 1702 was only a temporary reversal of Asante ascendancy (Daaku 1970: 173–174; Fynn 1971:24), and by opposing Asante in this period Akyem helped determine that Asante’s rising power would be directed against it in the future. By 1715 the two were building up arms to face one another, and in 1717 they went to war again. The Akyem, evidently utilizing what would become familiar tactics with the later Kotoku and Abuakwa, melted into the forest and fought primarily from ambush. While Apenten, one of the three Akyem leaders, was killed in the fighting, one surprise Akyem attack resulted not only in the death of the Asante king, but the capturing

¹⁰ The most comprehensive and analytical treatment of the complex internal and external factors that led to the fall of Akwamu remains that of Wilks (1958:80–110), though he incorrectly affixes the names Kotoku and Abuakwa to the Akyem forces. See also Wilks (1971:368–369), Daaku (1970:171–181), and Kwamena-Poh (1973:6, 22, 30–39), this last providing a reconstruction primarily from an Akwapim perspective.

of his skull — the most serious defeat and humiliation that could befall an Akan state (a narrative of this 1717 war and the events surrounding it is included in nearly all accounts of early Gold Coast history; see especially Priestly and Wilks 1960; Kwamena-Poh 1973:35–36).

In the early 1720's, Opoku Ware, the new Asante king, not only carried out a successful retaliatory expedition against Akyem, but then helped forge an uneasy and limited rapprochement between Asante and Akyem that held until 1742 (Kwamena-Poh 1973:36). The existence of some form of peaceful relationship between Asante and Akyem by the late 1720's (and the deterioration of Asante-Akwamu relations) is evident from Asante inactivity as Akyem made preparations for and then carried out its attack on Akwamu in 1730. Asante may have tacitly agreed to the Akyem attack, as Römer (1965[1760]:18) indicates; at any rate, as Fynn (1971:69–70) points out, Asante did not help its alleged ally Akwamu even as it fell.

THE PASSING OF OLD AKYEM, 1730–1775

The success of Akyem in the 1730 war with Akwamu was, paradoxically, the beginning of the end of Old Akyem as a political entity. The governmental structure of Akyem before 1730, with its tripartite sharing of leadership, was not highly unified, but the divisive tendencies present in this structure did not represent in any way embryonic Kotoku or Abuakwa polities. Only when large numbers of Akyem became spatially separated from the Old Akyem homeland, after flooding into the former territory of defeated and dispersed Akwamu, did divisive forces within the Old Akyem polity begin to follow lines that eventually differentiated Akyem Abuakwa from Akyem Kotoku. Divisions along these new lines were made sharper by the 1742 Asante defeat of Old Akyem and a series of events greatly influenced by Asante power and interference in internal Akyem affairs. I hope to show that the divisions in Akyem represented by such characteristics as relative geographical mobility versus immobility and pro-Asante versus anti-Asante positions had as one of their most important *results* the creation of Abuakwa and Kotoku polities from the parent Old Akyem. This is in contradistinction to the commonly held view that such divisions were determined by or reflected already existing political differentiation between Kotoku and Abuakwa (as put forth, e.g., by Wilks 1957, 1958, 1975; Johnson 1964; Fynn 1971; and Kwamena-Poh 1973).

There is no question that Akyem settlers moved into the old Akwamu homeland after 1730, and on a large scale: “after the collapse of Akwamu in the west, Abuakwa settlers, eager for *lebensraum*, poured into the conquered territories and established new towns side by side with the

surviving Akwamu towns” (Wilks 1958:116). Though the reference here is to *Abuakwa* settlers, there is no evidence that a distinct Abuakwa polity was being relocated in the old Akwamu homeland. The Akyem who migrated southward appear not have been accompanied by any of their major leaders. In fact, when the Akyem were faced with the problem of administering old Akwamu, they chose to govern it, despite the large influx of Akyem settlers, through a defeated Akwamu general, not an Akyem. It retained this indirectly ruled, subordinate status for over forty years (Wilks 1958:114, 129–135).

The movement of Akyem settlers to, and subsequent residence in, old Akwamu was a geographical phenomenon that only later took on political significance. Once they had moved, these Akyem were physically separated from the Akyem who remained in the Old Akyem territory. This could not have helped but create differences and rigidify whatever differences were already present. It was only with the banishment by Asante of one of the two Akyem rulers to the old Akwamu homeland in 1773, however, that political divisions developing over the previous thirty years or more were firmly aligned with geographical divisions and Old Akyem was finally replaced by Akyems Abuakwa and Kotoku.

The economic ramifications for Akyem of the fall of Akwamu were not confined to the old Akwamu lands now available to Akyem settlers. First, the notes specifying the ground rent owed by each of the three European forts in Accra passed from vanquished to victor. Fynn (1971:71) writes that Frempong Manso “became the political overlord of the Osu district in which stood Danish Christiansborg Castle,” while Bakwante “had charge of the Accra townships in which stood Dutch Crèvecoeur [Ussher Fort] and British James Fort. Thus, the Akyem chiefs, like the Akwamu kings before them, received ground rents from three European settlements and thereby secured a permanent, regular means of purchasing muskets and powder which were essential for their political and economic expansion.”¹¹ There was also general control of and free access to the coast at Accra, with all the trade benefits this brought, not least importantly the direct access to firearms and their accessories. In addition, the fall of Akwamu brought numerous captives under Akyem control. Akyem policy toward these slaves seemed designed to assimilate them rapidly, thus increasing Akyem’s numbers and strength (Rømer 1965[1760]:21);¹² Fynn (1971:72) reports that it was believed on the coast that Akyem feared an Asante attack from the end of 1730 on and hoped to use the captured Akwamu against such an attack. Finally,

¹¹ Owusu was the recipient of regular ground rent payments from the later 1730’s on the Danish fort Fredensborg at Great Ningo on the coast opposite Akwapim (Kwamena-Poh 1973:75–76; Norregard 1966:97).

¹² Reindorf’s passage (n.d. [1895]:78–79) on this topic reads suspiciously like Rømer’s; this is one of many instances in which it appears as if Reindorf had access to Rømer’s work.

territory beyond the old Akwamu area, most importantly the Akwapim hills, passed from Akwamu to Akyem control. The Akyem leader who took jurisdiction over much of this area was Owusu (Kwamena-Poh 1973:74–75; see also n. 11). Directly or indirectly, all these sources provided new wealth for both the Akyem treasury and many individual Akyem. Europeans at the Accra forts had mixed reactions to Akyem's good fortunes and increased presence. The Akyem were preferred overall to either the Akwamu before or Asante after; the gold brought to the coast during the brief period of Akyem dominance was of higher quality, but the trade was less regular and there were far fewer slaves to complement the gold (Rømer, 1965[1760]:20–25; Norregard 1966:80–83, 97).

The manner in which individuals or groups attempted to take advantage of the new opportunities made available by the 1730 victory, especially the opening up of old Akwamu land for settlement, surely played a role in the determination of which Akyem became Kotoku and which Abuakwa. Those Akyem who were areally tied, such as those tied to the gold mines of Old Akyem, or preferentially tied, such as the “owners” of land on which important towns or mines were located, or those with positive ties or relations with Asante would have been less likely to leave the Old Akyem homeland. It was factors such as these, I would argue, and not ties to embryonic or actual Abuakwa and Kotoku segments, that were the primary determinants influencing which Akyem moved or did not move.

The three leaders — Frempong Manso, Bakwante, and Owusu — who had ruled in Akyem before 1730 and led the Akyem to victory against Akwamu seem to have shared almost equally the new power and administrative responsibilities that came with their victory, including the administration, usually by indirect means, of conquered areas (Rømer 1965[1760]:23–24; Wilks 1958:112–124). This tripartite division of supreme authority continued until Asante interference in Akyem succession after 1742, which led to the loss of legitimacy and then to the elimination of one of the three Akyem stools. It was the elimination of this stool that aligned the patterns of division in Akyem in a way which led eventually to the disintegration of the Old Akyem polity into two components — Abuakwa and Kotoku.

In the 1742 war, all three Akyem rulers met their death. Apau, who had succeeded Frempong Manso in 1741, and Owusu were killed; Bakwante was captured and committed suicide. In the course of the fighting Asante also captured possible heirs to both Apau and Bakwante (Rømer 1965[1760]:31–32).¹³ Following the war the Asante “offered” these

¹³ Rømer specifically notes that it was heirs of these two lines that were captured, and Norregard (1966:108) identifies Owusu's successor as Pobi, i.e., *not* one of the two heirs captured by Asante. In light of this evidence, Fynn's assertions (n.d.:4; 1971:75) that Pobi succeeded Bakwante seem very strange.

royals as successors to their respective stools. The power of Asante caused their "offer" to be accepted, even though the candidates did not conform to Akyem succession preferences and had besides been captives of the *asantehene* and could be called his "slaves." Both Rømer (1965[1760]:32) and Kotoku tradition (Institute of African Studies 1966:8) claim that there were "older and consequently closer heirs" to the respective stools.

While it seems there was no alternative, in the face of Asante power, to seeing the two Asante-backed candidates enstooled, the two Akyem ruling lines which were affected ultimately responded to their respective imposed rulers in very different ways. The Denkyira-Mmerayam line includes Broni, the Asante-imposed successor to Apau, in its stool list, though significantly he is remembered not as a fully legitimate ruler, but as a regent (Institute of African Studies 1966:38). The man identified by Rømer (1965[1760]:31) as the Asante-imposed candidate to succeed Bakwante, "Ascharry" or Asare, was apparently even less acceptable to the Asona clan his stool represented, for with Asare's death, sometime after 1746 (Rømer 1965[1760]:45 refers to Asare as late as this), the Asona clan either did not fill the vacancy or did not recognize the legitimacy of the successor. This was possible without disinheriting the Asona line represented by the disfavored stool because the third Akyem stool was filled by a member of that line. After Asare's death, the Asona were represented at the highest level in Akyem by only one stool, filled at this time by Pobi, the successor to Owusu (see n. 13). It was this stool which became the paramount stool of Abuakwa.¹⁴

Two of the three major structural factors that produced distinct Akyems Abuakwa and Kotoku from the parent Old Akyem were now present. The first was a real separation and differentiation between the Old Akyem homeland and the area of old Akwamu opened up to large-scale Akyem settlement after the 1730 war. The second was dual paramounts rather than the older situation of sharing authority among three rulers. The tendency to fission is much greater with bipolar sharing of power than in a tripartite or other multiple-rule system. What was needed now was for the geographical tendencies toward fission (between the Old Akyem and old Akwamu homelands) to coincide with the new politico-administrative division between only two ruling stools (representing the Agona Denkyira-Mmerayam and Asona Owusu-Pobi lines).

Asante political power was the catalytic agent for that coincidence.

¹⁴ It is not surprising that Abuakwa king lists (provided by Djan 1936:104; Danquah 1928:242-243; and Reindorf n.d.[1895]:348-349) do not include Asare or indicate that Pobi and his successors represented a different Asona stool than did Ofori Panin and Bakwante; one of the purposes of such lists is to show an unbroken line of "Abuakwa" rulers stretching as far back in time as possible. For Fynn to have missed all of this (see also n. 13), however, is not so understandable.

During the period from the late 1740's to the early 1770's, the area of new Akyem settlements, at least partly because it was simply farther away from Asante than the Old Akyem homeland, became firmly identified as anti-Asante. Meanwhile, the area of Old Akyem seems to have been at least not as hostile to, and in limited ways even aligned with, Asante interests. This is not to say that pro- and anti-Asante factions did not exist in both areas or that the problem ever lent itself to clear-cut or permanent solutions (as the internal politics and shifting allegiances of later Abuakwa and Kotoku clearly reveal). In the main, however, and for most of the period under consideration, anti-Asante activities tended to be centered in the new Akyem settlements rather than in the Old Akyem homeland.¹⁵

Anti-Asante activities in Akyem surfaced less than five years after the 1742 war, when according to Danish reports Akyem repudiated Asante overlordship, left their country to take refuge in Fante, Kwahu, and Little Popo, and entered into an alliance with the Fante, Wassa, and others to fight Asante (Fynn 1971:80). There was no immediate war, but over the next several years the anti-Asante alliance added new members, and Asante access to the coast through the allied states was frequently blocked — a policy designed, as Tenkorang (1968) points out, primarily to restrict Asante access to firearms. While it is not clear from available 1740's sources whether or in what fashion Akyem was divided over the course of these events, sources from the 1750's and 1760's do provide such information.

Beginning in the mid-1750's, references appear which distinguish, for the first time, territorial divisions in Akyem which can be matched to one or the other of the two Akyem leaders. One such reference appears in a 1758 report submitted by two Dutch chief brokers who had visited both the anti-Asante allies and the Asante, between 1754 and 1758, in an attempt to settle the differences between the two. The *asantehene* Kusi Obodom proposed to them eight conditions for peace with the allies, one of which read as follows (National Archives, The Hague 1758):¹⁶ "Second, that he had taken under his protection together half of the countries of Akjim and Aowinie, that is the caboceers and peoples, who had come out of these countries to him, and now render his obedience, [and they] would for that reason remain unmolested by all of them [i.e., the four "allied Districts, namely Wassa, Dinkira, Tjuffer (Twifo), and Akjim"]'. It is evident that Akyem at this time was clearly divided, with one portion

¹⁵ This basic north-south division in Akyem with respect to being essentially pro- or anti-Asante is matched by developments all around Asante's southern periphery — e.g., it is traced in Assin by Berberich (i.p.), and Larry Yarak of Northwestern University, working on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Wassaw history, has discovered not only a north-south division, but other basic similarities between Wassa and Akyem as well.

¹⁶ I thank Larry Yarak for the translation from the Dutch (cf. Fynn's summation and use of this document [1971:89–91]).

enmeshed in an anti-Asante alliance and the other — Kusi Obodom claimed “half” seemingly aligned with Asante. There is little room for doubt that the “half” to which Kusi Obodom referred to as rendering him obedience was Old Akyem or portions of Old Akyem (essentially those portions lying between the Pra and Anum Rivers) that were surrounded by lands that were part of metropolitan Asante. While these portions of Old Akyem were not actually incorporated into Asante until the nineteenth century (Wilks 1975:51–52), already by the mid-eighteenth century their vulnerable location made them unsuitable as a base for anti-Asante activities. Moreover, they seem to have been ruled at this time by the man the Asante imposed on the Denkyira-Mmerayam stool after the 1742 war, the “slave” of Asante, Broni.

This last is implied by the fact that the anti-Asante portion of Akyem was then led by Pobi Asomanin, who had succeeded Owusu in 1742. It must have been Pobi who led the Akyem opposed to Asante into the anti-Asante alliance with the Wassaw and others and who kept the paths through Akyem and Akwapim closed from the late 1740’s on, but Pobi was killed following the Asante defeat of Akyem forces in 1765. His successor, Obirikoran, was chosen and enstooled by the Asante. It was not long, however, before Obirikoran was leading a “Residue of the Akim nation” in various anti-Asante activities.¹⁷ In 1767, Obirikoran irritated Asante with his aggressive policies to the east of the old Akwamu homeland, and from 1767 to 1772 he led his “Residue” of Akyem in several clashes with Asante. Finally, in 1772, the Asante sent a large army into Akyem once again. Obirikoran’s “lands [presumably to the west of the Atewa Range — see n. 4] were occupied and Obirikane retreated to Old Akwamu [presumably to the east] and submitted to Asantehene Osei Kojo” (Wilks 1958:134; Kwamena-Poh 1973:81).

The next year Obirikoran invited the Dutch to attempt reconciliation with Asante so that he could return to his lands. Despite this attempt, he was deposed by the Asante (he continued to fight Asante from exile into the 1780’s). The Asante enstooled in his place another candidate of their choosing, Twum Ampoforo. Even though Ampoforo affirmed allegiance to Asante (and maintained this allegiance until he was deposed by his people ca. 1794), he was not allowed to return to Old Akyem. This was presumably to prevent him from becoming a focus for any anti-Asante activities in that “half” of Akyem. Instead, he “was obliged to remain with his people in Old Akwamu, where a new Abuakwa capital was established at Kibi” (Wilks 1958:134).

Thus, Wilks states (p. 135), came the final disappearance of old Akwamu as a political entity: “the Akwamu chiefs swore allegiance to Mpoforo, recognizing him as their paramount, and were integrated into

¹⁷ The phrase “Residue of the Akim nation” is from English documents dated to the later 1760’s (Public Records Office, London, T70/31) quoted in Wilks (1975:28).

the Akim Abuakwa state.” Thence, also, though Wilks apparently does not recognize it, came the final stage in the emergence of the polities of Akyem Abuakwa and Akyem Kotoku. The two geographical and the two political divisions that had been present in Akyem and in the process of aligning themselves for almost a quarter-century were now firmly congruent. Akyems Abuakwa and Kotoku were the results.

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